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BRIEFER COMMUNICATIONS.

THE ORGANIC CONCEPT OF SOCIETY.

Professor Patten's objections to "the organic concept of society" concern two distinct issues: first, what is the nature of social relations? second, what is the best method of investigating and expounding social relations? * Because Professor Patten's argument seems to me to introduce issues which are neither germane nor pertinent to the proper subject, I cannot reply to it premise by premise, but must be content with a restatement which I will try to make direct and clear.

First, as to the *nature* of social relations. The proposition, "society is organic," is an attempt to assert in the briefest form a most obvious truth. Instead of committing sociologists to some mystical hypothesis, it is the truism from which sociologists make their departure in social observation.

In one of his lectures to workingmen Mr. Huxley said: "In almost all living beings you can distinguish several distinct portions, set apart to do particular things and work in a particular way. These are termed 'organs,' and the whole together is called 'organic.' And as it is universally characteristic of them, this term 'organic' has been very conveniently employed to denote the whole of living nature."

Let us suppose that no other expression of Mr. Huxley's views were known to us. Would it be intelligent, not to say scientific, to argue that this Mr. Huxley is surely on the wrong track because the jelly fish and the falcon and the elephant have very different forms, and widely contrasted relations with their environment, and peculiar internal economies? Would it be relevant to dispute Mr. Huxley's proposition on the ground that it is compatible with misconceptions about the origin of species, or because it would lend itself to an inadequate formulation of evolution? Yet this seems to me precisely analogous with Professor Patten's contention against "the organic conception."

Professor Patten concedes that "the industrial organism" is a fact. But he proceeds to discuss the "cause" of the fact. I submit that the metaphysics or even the physics of the phenomena will hardly be authenticated by denying the generality of the phenomena themselves. The "organic conception" is the subject under discussion, not the antecedents of the facts out of which the organic conception

* See "The Organic Concept of Society." ANNALS, Vol. V, p. 404, November, 1894.

is composed. We may agree or disagree with Professor Patten's metaphysics at this point without gain or loss to the enquiry at hand.

"From no point of view," continues Professor Patten, "is society more truly organic than in its economic aspect. . . . Economists, however, reject the organic concept of society, and prefer to deduce their economic laws from the theory of utility, and the facts of the objective world." I was not previously aware that the economists had discarded the organic conception, but, accepting competent testimony, am I expected by Professor Patten to substitute this alleged conclusion of the economists for examination of the facts themselves? Did the refusal of geographers and navigators to accept the sphericity of the earth prove that the globe was flat?

The perception implied in "the organic concept" is that there is intimate inter-relation and inter-dependence among the individuals and the groups which constitute society; that these reactions affect not only the industrial activities, but every activity; that the division of labor effected by reciprocal actions makes each element of society an agent performing or hindering a service for other social elements. I have said that the bare assertion of the essential idea in "the organic concept" is a truism. I would not believe without ocular proof that anybody could seriously attempt to argue down this truism. It is either a fact or it is not that all industrial activities, and all other human activities as well, modify and are in turn modified by co-existent domestic institutions and conditions; social traditions, habits and preferences; intellectual poverty, possessions or pursuits; æsthetic standards, tastes, creations; moral codes, superstitions, forms of worship, fears, hopes, beliefs. I dissent most emphatically from Professor Patten's judgment that a simpler expression of this fact of reciprocal modification is contained in his formula "each individual creates his own subjective environment to supplement the objective environment with which he is in contact." The proposition may or may not be adequate and final in its own time and place, but it does not affect "the organic concept" one way or the other. If it were necessary, as a preliminary to social observation, to think of "subjective environments" in reaction against objective environment, rather than of *persons* conditioned by an environment made up of impersonal and personal elements, I should feel myself equal to the task of considering society as a collection of environments in perpetual collision with each other; but after that is done, how is Professor Patten's case strengthened? The primary perception of "the organic concept" is that every man in society leads, in some particulars, a different life, and a different vocational life, from that which would be his lot if any single other kind of man were not in existence. The life of artisan

and artist, priest and player, politician and farmer, author and sailor, is modified by the fact that each of the others has a place and a vocation. Whether this modification is through the medium of a "subjective environment" is a question entirely distinct from and properly subsequent to the statement of fact. Professor Patten might just as well open a controversy over an elementary description of chemical reactions, on the ground that it does not drag in the lecturer's opinions about the vortex theory or the nebular hypothesis.

Professor Patten's illustration of the driver changing the course of his team first on account of a stone in the road, and again to avoid collision with another team, suggests to me a possible explanation of what must otherwise be hypercriticism. Is "the organic concept" understood to connote interpretation of the individual as merely the passive recipient of external impulse? Is it supposed that "the organic concept" makes individual action the mechanical resultant of forces operating from without, and effective in direct ratio of momentum to passive mass? If so, I have simply to say that this is a case of mistaken identity. The "organic concept" is not a snap judgment upon problems in psychology. It is a recognition of obvious appearances, among which problems of psychology emerge. In the supposed case, "the organic concept" as such merely makes note of the fact that the stone and the team are elements of objective condition because of which the action of the driver differs from that which he would have performed had these conditions not existed. The specific interpretation of relations within "the social organism" awaits conclusions upon just such psychic problems as this case presents. Whether the action of the driver is to be explained in one way or another, we do not anticipate that the explanation will get rid of the fact that somehow the stone and the wagon gave the driver occasion to behave in a way which he would not else have chosen. The "organic concept" is the innocent perception that individual or group action is invariably an element or a resultant of a similar reaction in which objective inorganic or organic factors are also elements. This is not an assertion about the process of the reaction, but a statement of the fact of which the process is to be sought. I would be the last to deny that melancholy masses of nonsense about society have been promulgated in terms of organic relationships; but what truth is so clear that it has not been appropriated to the service of error? A policy of social investigation which takes its departure from assault upon this primary concept resembles a campaign for civil service reform begun by making a bogey of the Declaration of Independence.

The second part of Professor Patten's objection, referring to the method of investigating and expounding social relations, has also a

double bearing. It is directed first against Small and Vincent's application of the positive method in particular, and second against the use of biological analogies in general.

On the former subject the criticism asserts: "No better example of the evil results springing from the use of this method can be found than in the work upon which I am commenting. The whole of the second book is given up to a description of the growth of a Western city from its first settlement until the present time. *It is implied that this description illustrates all the various phases of social structure and activity.*"

The first answer to the objection may make further reply superfluous. The fact is the authors introduced the book in question with the explicit statement: "*An attempt to describe a truly typical society is distinctly disclaimed,*" (p. 99). The minute description of a particular town in the process of growth, and its contemporary activities, no more implies an intention to make the description contain what does not appear in the facts, than demonstration of the anatomy of a crab or a toad before a class of beginners in physiology implies the intention of the lecturer to read into the structure of these specimens a complete classification of the animal kingdom. A primary object of such description is to set before students the necessity of knowing accurately some small section of reality, at least, before all related reality can be comprehended.

Professor Patten further urges that "*a false concept of social growth is given by such a picture, and false ideals are inculcated which do immeasurable harm.*" It is certainly venturesome to adduce facts, and describe actualities, when theories are unprepared to assimilate them; but such is the rashness of investigators in this generation that some of them at least prefer the dangers incident to consideration of things as they are to the alternative of speculation. It is doubtless an impertinence for settlements to grow into towns and towns into cities, but that phenomenon is occurring in the world, and in order to know the world as it is, precise knowledge of this phenomenon is among the items of necessary information. It is a sad fact that in this particular town, we have located no conspicuous metaphysical generalizations, but we must protest that this is the fault of the town itself. No such institutions appear on its map or figure in its directory. The fact that they do not play an evident rôle, together with Professor Patten's indictment of the book for describing what does appear, reminds me of an elderly gentleman whom I knew in Berlin several years ago. He had been a life-long student of language. His knowledge of German syntax and pronunciation had been obtained from an American-made grammar. The German spoken in Berlin did not correspond

with the preconceptions which he had brought from America. His time in the German capital was devoted to attempts to persuade every citizen who would listen to him that the Germans did not know how to speak their own language ; their formation of sentences was illogical, their idioms were impossible, their pronunciations were exhibits of phonetic decay. If the capital of a Western State is so perverse as not to demonstrate Professor Patten's theories, perhaps it is the duty of Congress to interfere.

The criticism continues :—"The errors of socialism are mainly due to picturing such economic aggregates as though they were true societies, and representing them as exemplifications of the normal tendencies of social progress." Again I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Patten. This location of the chief source of socialistic errors had not previously come to my knowledge ; but does Professor Patten mean that science would be advanced by treating actual human communities as though they did not exist, and by pursuing social ratiocinations in serene disregard of realities? The method which Professor Patten condemns is the same method which dialecticians have always rejected. It has nevertheless made its way into authority in one science after another until scholars, with very few exceptions, are convinced that generalizations are of little value unless they are either derived from or authorized by precise knowledge of particulars. The method of carefully examining one social group after another and one civilization after another and of classifying and generalizing results is the only method which can authenticate social philosophy.

As to the second part of Professor Patten's objection to method, I am tempted to indulge, first, in the *tu quoque* form of reply. If biological language has no place in social analysis, it would be interesting to learn how Professor Patten excuses himself for adopting from Professor Ward, and promoting to high rank in his terminology, the phrase "subjective environment," which consistency demands that he repudiate as flagrant miscegenation of psychology and biology !

Not to deal too flippantly with a serious question of methodology ; it ought to be enough to repeat the assurances which have been given over and over again that biological analogies, similes, metaphors, or even literal technicalities, are used in sociology for just what they are worth as suggestions, hypotheses, symbols or other tools of investigation. They are used not with the assumption that biology without psychology can establish and complete sociology ; but with the belief that the problems of psychology, for the settlement of which sociologists are anxious, cannot at present even be stated, in the clearest form, without the assistance of associations contained in terms which biology has made expressive. We do not care how soon, or how

completely sociology or psychology supersedes biological language. At present no terms are available which send us out upon so many searches for precise social facts as the terms which have been filled with meaning by the biologists. The sociologists hope and believe that persistent positive investigation of social facts will create a language of sociology which will be appropriate and unequivocal. At present, as sociologists have acknowledged time and time again, we are getting from biology aid similar in kind, but immeasurably superior in amount, to that which the early biologists derived from superficial social observation, and from conventional social concepts. Thus when Milne-Edwards formulated the principle of physiological division of labor, in 1827, he wrote: "*Tout animal est une société coopérative.*"* Lewes has called attention to the fact that Goethe developed the same idea quite perfectly in reference to plants at an earlier date than 1827. Joh. C. Reil wrote in 1795:† "*Der thierische Körper ist gleichsam eine grosse Republik, die aus mehreren Theilen besteht, welche zwar sämmtlich in einem bestimmten Verhältniss gegen einander stehen, und einzeln zur Erhaltung des Ganzen mitwirken.*"

Biology was not pledged by the use of these suggestive analogies to find or invent in animal bodies administrative machinery corresponding to every office and function of a "co-operative society" or a "republic." It did not undertake to find anatomical parts to be named "buying agents," and "treasurers," and "sheriffs" and "election commissioners." No more does sociology attempt to carry out a mechanical analogy on its side, when it learns from developed biology of intimate relations between parts in the animal body, and upon that suggestion recognizes in society an "organism,"—of a low order to be sure, if literal biological criteria be applied, as Professor Ward has lately said—but an aggregate of inter-related parts, the facts and processes of whose inter-relations become, from the impulse of biology, more peremptory subjects of study. Probably even Professor Patten would join me in pronouncing silly and stupid a recent attempt to confound the users of biological clues to social relations, by demanding that they produce the *finger nails* of society!

It is impossible to treat very seriously any criticism of sociology at the points here discussed. I do not feel bound to apologize for the crude attempts of many men in the past to make out social laws by the mechanical application of physiological types and precedents. I am not acquainted with a single responsible student of sociology to-day whose use of biological suggestions in method, is impeachable

* "Physiology," vol. xiv., p. 266. cf. "*Dictionnaire classique d'histoire naturelle*," t. xii. p. 346.

† *Archiv für Physiologie*, vol. i., p. 105.

by valid logic. So long as there remain uninterpreted relations in society, finical objections to the verbal or symbolic forms in which approximate interpretations are recorded for further examination should be regarded as the off-duty amusement of scholars, and treated as playfully as I have felt bound to deal with portions of the subject matter of Professor Patten's note. Sociology is not biology. Sociology is not a transcription of biological results. Sociology, however, must not only take into account vital facts, it must get all the help possible from vital analogies, or partial analogies, or from contrasts with vital facts. With this understanding it ought to be easy to transfer the debate from truisms to uncertainties. Professor Patten alludes in his note to a score of problems which are well worthy of attention, to the solution of some of which he will undoubtedly make important contributions. That end will not be promoted, however, by needless complication of essential difficulties with misconceptions of obvious and meaning truths. Whatever room there may be for differences of opinion about the metaphysics of human desire, or about the processes of human satisfaction, or about the division of labor among these problems, or about the most appropriate language with which to conduct investigations and report results, attack upon "the organic concept" is an entirely mistaken policy, and we owe it to ourselves to abandon it in favor of more profitable pursuits.

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SOCIOLOGY AND THE ABSTRACT SCIENCES. THE ORIGIN OF THE
SOCIAL FEELINGS.

Professor Patten's communication on "The Relation of Economics to Sociology," in the ANNALS for January, narrows the main issue between his views and mine to a mere question of what my conception of sociology is and what it is not. He says :

"At any rate, they (the sociologists) must choose between making their science a hypothetical science, dealing with the theory of social forces, and a realistic science dealing with the aggregate phenomena of the social world. Professor Giddings does not recognize this distinction. He defines sociology as an 'attempt to account for the origin, growth, structure and activities of human society by the operation of physical, vital, and psychical causes, working together in a process of evolution.' Here he evidently has in mind a concrete realistic science treating of all the phenomena of human society. On page 18, however, he says that 'sociology may be defined as the science of social elements and first principles.' Here I understand him to refer to the hypothetical science dealing with the social forces."